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TAGS: PREL MARR GL FI  
SUBJECT: CHIEF OF THE FINNISH DEFENSE FORCES MEETING WITH RUSSIAN ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF

Classified By: DAO JOY SHASTEEN FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

#### SUMMARY AND INTRODUCTION

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¶1. (C) ADM Juhani Kaskeala, Chief of the Finnish Defense Forces (CHOD), briefed the Ambassador on his recent trip to Russia, where he met with the Russian Army Chief of Staff (and Deputy Defense Minister) Yuri Baluyevsky. Kaskeala and Baluyevsky discussed, inter alia, the US missile defense initiative in Poland and the Czech Republic; Kosovo; a Russian offer of defense sales to Finland; NATO and Iraq. ADM Kaskeala stated that his discussions with the Russian Army Chief were cordial and frank; unlike the previous Army Chief, Colonel-General Baluyevsky was "encouraging and not dictatorial." The Finnish CHOD also discussed a recent visit to Greenland and his satisfaction with the newly proposed Finnish defense budget. End summary.

Russia

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¶2. (SBU) The CHOD stated that he gave a verbal invitation to the Russian Army Chief to join the Nordic Defense Chiefs' meeting this year. The Russian Army Chief was not able to accept this year's invitation, but said that he would look forward to next year.

¶3. (SBU) The CHOD also invited the Army chief to send Russian officers to the command and control exercises that Finland conducts for peacekeeper. The CHOD stated that this type of training would improve the Russian view of what NATO and peacekeeping are about and would be of more value than simply having troop exchanges.

¶4. (SBU) The CHOD invited the Russian Army chief to further their dialogue on creating a recognized Maritime picture of the Gulf of Finland that can be used by both the civilian and military sectors in tracking the traffic in the Gulf of Finland.

¶5. (C) The CHOD offered the Russian military opportunities to attend the Finnish National Defence University as both students and instructors. The CHOD thought it would be a great asset to the NDU student to learn both the Finnish and Russian view of the Winter and Continuation Wars (WWII) in Finland. The CHOD also discussed the possibility of having junior officer exchanges at the company grade-level, envisioning the Finnish and Russian captains of two companies of Finnish or Russian soldiers working together and the importance of that experience for both. (Marshal Mannerheim who led Finland through the WWII years had training in the Tsarist military system; this experience served him well

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in conducting campaigns against Russian forces.) The CHOD underscored for the Ambassador that the emphasis would be on showing Russian officers that physical abuse and bullying are not the best means to train good soldiers. Finnish military training would then serve as an example of how a democracy trains its military forces.

¶6. (C) The CHOD noted that the average Russian officer exhibited more pride in his unit than the last time he (the CHOD) visited (pre 2004). He said the units he saw had clean and functioning infrastructure and that the officers voiced strong support for President Putin, whom the Russian officer corps sees as the main person making this revival of the Russian military happen. Colonel General Baluyevsky stated that their renewal plan is going forward as scheduled beginning with infrastructure improvements, then concentrating on recruiting and

keeping quality people and finally focusing on equipment acquisition.

¶7. (SBU) The Russian Army Chief then asked ADM Kaskeala if the Finnish Defense Force would be interested in buying equipment from Russia. The CHOD stated that Finland would be fine with Russian equipment, if: it meets NATO standards and as long as the Russian defense industry followed the appropriate Finnish and EU rules on defense equipment buying, i.e. the Finnish government first looks for a Finnish company to fill the requirement, then EU companies, then it goes to third parties.

¶8. (C) The conversation also touched on Kosovo, with Kaskeala asking Baluyevsky if he truly believed that independence for Kosovo would serve as a "domino" for other areas in conflict. When the Russian confirmed that was his belief, Kaskeala pursued the line of inquiry further, asking whether the "domino theory" would hold if Kosovo grew tired of waiting and ultimately declared itself independent. Kaskeala expressed his doubt that such a step by Kosovo would cause other "domino countries" to follow suit. In the end, the CHOD commented that the two flag officers agreed to disagree on this issue.

¶9. (C) Colonel-General Baluyevsky asked ADM Kaseala's opinion of Iraq. The CHOD stated that he was pessimistic, that conditions appeared to be that a full civil war which should not have intervention (on either side) from an outside source. Both felt, said the CHOD, that there was not a "military only" solution.

¶10. (C) The two military leaders also discussed the European Missile Defense system. After the CHOD neatly laid out the NATO Military Committee chairman's argument on having the system in place in Europe the Russian Army Chief stated that the Russian position on this is a geopolitical and not a military one.

¶11. (C) The CHOD ended his comments to the Ambassador by saying that he thought that the Russian officer corps saw itself rising back to the level of a better trained and equipped group of professionals and that recent examples of the Russian military reaching out beyond its borders, such as the TU 95 fly-by of Guam and the Russian submarine "flag-planting" in the Arctic, were part of the exercise of Russian military capability echoing the past "glory" of a stronger, better funded force.

Budget

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¶12. (C) The CHOD expressed some satisfaction with what he expects the Finnish government's 2009 budget program -- slated for announcement in early fall --- will contain for the armed forces. He stated that a defense budget plus-up proposal of eight percent appears likely

which would allow the MOD to obtain 18 Hawk trainers from Switzerland; to conduct the necessary reserve training for next year; and to continue EU Battlegroup support. He commented that the budget process is going much more smoothly this year with the MOD, Finance Minister and Prime Minister all in agreement.

Greenland

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¶ 13. (C) The CHOD discussed his recent visit to Greenland where he got a chance to see the retreating ice shelf and the formation of new icebergs. He said that he, the Danish CHOD and the German CHOD were there when the Russian submarine "planted" the Russian flag capsule. He remarked the Russians' action prompted a series of phone calls and conversations within the Danish and German Ministries of Defense. However, from the Finnish point of view, the flag-planting was clearly for domestic Russian public consumption and not a cause for enormous concern.

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